

# Buffalo Tales

May/June 2016

## **Life on the South Loup and Shecklers Lake, 1876-1880**

### **by Corene Phillips from Pleasanton on the Loup: Pleasanton's Centennial**

John Sheckler, early settler on the South Loup River, came to Loup Township in May of 1876. He homesteaded in Section 34 and bought a 40-acre lot in Section 35 known as Greers Grove or Greers Timber claim. A dugout, his first home, was located on the lake which became known as Shecklers Lake.

Even though Pleasanton wouldn't be platted for another fourteen years, there was an active community here by 1876. Travel between Kearney and this part of the South Loup River was brisk. John's vantage point allowed him easy observation of that travel as well as those people he saw traveling up and down the Loup and on up Pleasant Valley. On September 7, 1877 he noted an old man going up the Loup with 900 sheep. Once he even saw a man leading a buffalo!

John's diaries, dated 1877-1878, reveal that these travelers frequently stopped at his home to rest, take meals with him, or he visited them in Kearney or along the way. All the following families came in contact

with him during this period: Alexander, Altaffer, Baillie, Ball, Barker, Bennett, Beswick, Beyer, Borders, Boyer, Bray, Brown, Bunel, Campbell, Carr, Christy, Church, Clark, Collier, Colwell, Cornell, Dick, Fisher, Fitts, Freach, George, Grant, Gray, Greer, Hassey, Hays, Heath, Holmes, Howard, Hully (Hooley), Hunter, Hutchinson, Jinkins, Jones, Jorden, Kapel (Capel), Keach, Klein (Cline), Kutison, Lee, Mapes, Manerd, Mauler, McBeth, McBride, McCan, McNeal, Morse, More (Moore), Miles, Neff (Negh), Nickman, Oakley, Padel-fort (d), Patters, Patterson, Peake, peters, Peterson, Phillips, Plott, Ratcliff, Roberts, Rosco (Rusco), Smith, Springer, St. Peters, Teadwell, Stockdale, Sueely, Swiney, Tapan, Taylor, Tisdale, Thompson, Thornton, Turner, Waldron, Waters, Weller, Whitman, Wilies, Willard, and Wright.

Since several years were needed to break the prairie sod and raise suitable crops, the early settlers had to find means to support themselves. John and the other settlers solved this problem by selling butter, eggs, and wood. Entries in the diary reveal 140 loads of wood being cut and hauled from Section 3 and 4 of Rusco Township during this two year period. Teams from as far away as Kearney, Gibbon, Buckeye Valley, and the area between came here for wood. John hauled 14 loads to Kearney the first year but seldom hauled wood the next year. The wood was sold for \$1.50-\$2.00 a load and used as firewood.



John and Christina [Mauler] Sheckler  
Photo from Pleasanton on the Loup: Pleasanton's Centennial

On January 30, 1878, John observed 15 teams leaving the two sections with wood. Mrs. Keach, a neighbor across the river, was selling trees for one dollar apiece. Consequently, little wood was left for the settlers arriving in the 1880s.

The lake, Peters bridge, and Carr's Post Office was the hub of activity during these years. John frequented the post office a couple times a week. There he chatted with the Carrs and his neighbors. Mail was delivered on Thursdays. Charley French, sometimes accompanied by his sister, brought the mail as well as other supplies which would require a wagon or perhaps a stagecoach. Maps show the post office as being on a stagecoach line.

In December of 1877, there were six teams of horses on the north side of the river and twelve teams on the south side. Anyone going to Kearney brought supplies back for the neighbors. Supplies would also be purchased from Mr. Beyer northwest of the lake. There was much borrowing and sharing supplies on credit. John Sheckler's home was a combination hotel, diner, bank, and grocery store. He sold potatoes, eggs, butter, flour, meat, loaned money and tools, and bartered with neighbors for supplies. John would loan his ax to settlers coming to cut wood! Mr. Peters and Mrs. St. Peters made sorghum for the community.

There was an abundance of wild life along the lake and river. John mentioned a fellow named Wright stopping by with furs he had trapped and the skins from black-tailed deer. John and his dog, Carlow, hunted rabbits, and Mr. Plott furnished John with venison. Men from Gibbon hunted ducks on the lake and stayed in his dugout. Neighbors like the Hunters and Stockdales fished in the lake. John fished nearly every day during the summer of 1877 and caught 40 fish in one morning. Rattlesnakes, adders, blue racers, garter snakes, and bull snakes were killed by John in the area. He killed 14 rattlesnakes on his land. Mr. Holmes and John made a dugout canoe for the lake. John Borders, Miss Morrison, Rughterford Holmes, and Miss Border came to the lake on June 5, 1877 for a day of canoeing and fun. The lake was much deeper and bigger than it is today.

Several deaths and births were included in the journal. Two young men drowned in the lake Saturday, June 9, 1877. They were a Borders and Thornton boy from Thornton Township. A Funeral was held at Carr's for Mrs. Carr, wife of the postmaster, on July 1, 1877. She was probably buried on their land in Section 24 of Loup Township. January 18, 1878 Mr. and Mrs. Keach had a baby whom they named Pearl. John visited Mr. and Mrs. Peters new baby boy on March 30, 1877. A baby was born around February 11, 1878 to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Boyer. John Campbell, Mr. Miles, and John went to Swensons to hunt for a lost boy on September 29, 1878. They road all day but didn't find him. October 1, 1878 they again went to Swensons to hunt for the Pearson boy. A few days later, John had a fire but was able to save the stable and his wheat. The next day, Frank Boyer and his family came to stay with John because they were afraid of Indians. Perhaps it all had something to do with the disappearance of the little Pearson boy, who was never found.

Neighbors such as Mr. Jordon, Mr. Moore, Mr. Rusco, Mr. Daniels, Mr. Peters, Mr. Peak, Mr. Joe Benett, and Mr. Boyer helped John thresh grain on November 2, 1877. Mrs. Peters did the cooking. However, the journal does not state how the threshing was done. These men exchanged work with such jobs as butchering, cutting and hauling wood, and plowing.

Without fences, it was necessary to herd the cattle and hogs. One day John rode 25 miles gathering up his livestock. Mr. Peters charged 35 cents a month and furnished the salt to herd John's cattle. Mr. Hooley, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Miles had ranches west of John and many people from as far away as Kearney hired them as herders. These cattle were often in John's corn, but the ranchers always paid for damages.

Each day's weather was duly noted in the diary. The following is an entry from July 8, 1878:



Monday, July 8, 1878: plowed corn till noon sold libarger Mr. Keechs carrell for ten dollars very warm and sultry started to the office and got caught in a fearful hail storm I come very near losing my life and my two horses I was pounded on the head till the blood run down my neck when the storm eased up a little I drove up to the house and got out but I could not get in the house the men carried me in I was near chilled to death I got two paper on letter from D.P. Balie with a check for 6 dollars I could not cross the crick I stayed all night at Mr. Hunters with Mr. Dick and boy (and) Mr. Clark

Tuesday, July 9, 1878 rained all last night come home and had to swim Drie creek

[The following was dated May 22, 1882.] Begain to rain a 8 o'clock and rained until two o'clock them began to snow"

The neighbors got together for holidays. On July 4, 1877, a picnic was held at Mr. Peter's home in Pleasant Valley. Mr. Hunter played the violin, and the guests danced all night. Mrs. Peters had a turkey roast on December 25, 1877. Guest included Mr. and Mrs. Swenson and John. A dance was held that night at Mr. Houey's (Hooley?). The next Independence Day, John had a picnic in Greer's Grove, and then they danced all night at the Mapes home. Christmas 1878 was spent at home with Frank Hunter as the only guest. The Branson Lee family called in the afternoon, and John accompanied them up to Mr. Miles's dance, coming home at 4:00 am.

House dances were to be a popular form of entertainment. John mentioned dancing at the homes of the Peters, Barkers, Jordans, Hooleys, Mapes, Keaches, Moores, and at his own home. John held his dance June 17, 1878. He made doughnuts and had Mrs. Keach make some cakes with sugar. There were eight ladies at his dance: Miss Mattie Church, Miss Moore, Miss Nellie Woodard, Mrs. Keach, Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Miles, Mrs. Mapes, and Mrs. Padelford. Mr. Putman and John Barker played violins. Adon Keach was the floor manager. Mr. Thompson, Mr. Mapes, Mr. Carr, John Jones, John Peters, William Rusco, Mr. Moore, Jo Bennett, Milard Miles, Mr. Lamanta, Mr. Plott, and Mr. Padelford were also guests. Mr. Campbell brought his lamp and provided light!

Life on the prairie was still very lonely. John was especially sad when the Keach Family left June 7, 1878 for "the hills." Several entries in the diary during the winter of 1878 allude to this fact. John mentions that it was a "lonely day and I don't feel like working" or my "mind went back to when I was young and of my old home in Ohio." When he was lonely, "playing with the cat" seemed to ease his depression.

John, who kept abreast of the outside world by reading several newspapers, was a part of the early township government. April 2, 1877 he went over to a school meeting where Mr. Carr was elected treasurer. November 5, 1877 he again went over to the election and voted the Democratic ticket. March 9, 1878 John served on jury duty on the Beaver in Loup Precinct where Cap Hutchison served as judge.

John's journal entries end December 31, 1878, but he continued to keep his farm accounts in it until the early 1880s. He had less time to spend reporting as this entry would explain:

"November 25, 1880, verry cold I went up to Mr. Mauler to get married to Miss Christina Mauler Mr O holmes come over and married us then we had a good dinner and had a good time then my sweet wife and me come home and she is sitting by my side while I am writing these few lines."

## 2016 Calendar of Events

**Sunday, June 5: 9th Annual 1/2 Marathon, 10K, & 5K Buffalo County Stampede**-registration is at 6 am-race begins at 7.

**Saturday, June 18 10-1 pm: 31st Annual Wagons West Celebration**-Live music, delicious food, exhibitors, demonstrators, archive researchers, kids' games, and contests (including, back by popular demand ---the BEARD contest). FREE admission/donations are appreciated.

**Prairie Blacksmith Association's Fall Conference**-Date TBD

**Dec.3-4 and Dec. 10-11 from 1-5 pm:** Open to the public: **29th Annual Christmas Tree Walk** -check out dozens of trees decorated by area not-for-profits that tie their mission into this year's theme, Christmas Cinema. \*\*\*All of November: Decorating (during regular business hours plus open late on Thursday, Nov. 3 for decorating)\*\*\* **Saturday, December 3 from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 29th Annual Christmas Tree Walk\*\*\***

## Education notes (see website for additional details):

\*Listen to **Mardi Anderson on KGFW 1340 AM** at 9 am on the last Friday of each month for fabulous stories about Buffalo County!

\*Join the **Trails & Rails Museum Blacksmith Guild** (time and dates TBD) to learn about blacksmithing and/or possibly join in the fun!

\*The **Archive Department** will be open on Mondays from 1:30-4 year-round or by appointment.

\***Fabulous Fridays** are held on the 2nd Friday monthly at 2 pm. Check the website for locations.

**May:** On the Road to Ravenna for a tour of the Historical Center of Ravenna

**June:** Washday in the Olden Days

**July:** Postal Service in Buffalo County Through the Years

**August:** The Brick Yard in Kearney, NE

**September:** Chickens on the Farm

**October:** Jelly Making of Long Ago with Choke Cherries, Grapes, etc.

**November:** Kearney Goes to War, 1941

**December:** Christmas Traditions

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

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## **We appreciate your support!**

### Director's Report

-Very busy time of year at the museum! In one weekend we had a wedding, blacksmith hammer-in, 1/2 marathon packet pick-up, and the 1/2 marathon, 10K, and 5K.

-Helped promote the author Rinker Buck. The Kearney Public Library had 112 in attendance and promoted our Wagons West for us. Great partnership. Christy and I are already working on partnering for another one.

-I worked with Evan Paitz on finding new laptops, a tablet, and wifi equipment for the museum. He managed to find us a good deal on laptops so we could get one more than anticipated. He has gotten them all set up and they are working wonderfully. This technology was purchased with a Theodore G. Baldwin Foundation grant, which we are very grateful for.

-Taylor did a great job organizing Wagons West this year. We had the Kearney Community Theatre here for two showing of a 1/2 an hour long melodrama and music for the last hour. Several exhibitors and cultural partners joined us, also.

-Kearney Community Learning Center is coming out once a week to do different projects at Trails & Rails such as gardening, sewing, and painting. We appreciate their efforts and are glad we could partner with them this summer.

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(Contact Trails & Rails Museum for more information on becoming an Engineer)

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**Trails & Rails Museum**

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